



The New Leaf

Clarke County Conservation

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Conservation Director : Scott Kent

2024

Greetings from the Director

Normally in the winter time things slow down a little and we are able to catch up on the things that had been neglected all summer and get caught up on some of our inside work. Well, we haven't had much of a winter this year and what little we had kept us busy plowing snow. With several projects in the works and the mild winter, we have been very busy and I am afraid it will be the busy time of year for us again before we know it.

The biggest project right now is the new Community Education Building. It is exciting to see construction of this facility finally begin. One of the good things about the mild winter is it has allowed for the construction to continue all season. All of the underground infrastructure like water lines, septic system, and electric lines are in place. The walls were erected towards the end of January with the roof in place shortly afterward. Total enclosure of the building should be completed soon and then the inside work can begin. We are hopeful that it can be completed sometime mid spring so it can be used during the graduation/Memorial Day season. One of the main goals with this building is to offer more programs to the public. We will have a summer intern that will plan and coordinate most of these activities. Let us know if there is a program you would like to see!



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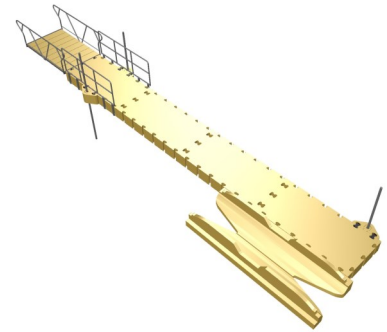
Director – Bev Seeberger

Greetings from the Director continued.....



Another project that we were able to accomplish this fall while the weather was good, was a flight cage for rehabilitating injured raptors such as hawks and owls. We were lucky enough to have an old corn crib donated to us by Steve Scott. Steve had reconstructed the old crib into a large cage for raising turkey years ago by arranging the panels of the corn crib on its side. Steve, Morgan (Park Technician) and myself took the panels apart and brought them to the park a year ago. This fall Morgan and myself bolted the panels back together and used lumber to block off the ends. The total structure stands twelve feet tall and is fifty-four feet long. This size meets the federal requirement for a flight cage for the size of birds we rehab. Morgan and I are both licensed raptor rehabilitators in the state of Iowa and apprentice under Beth Brown on her federal license. The new flight cage will allow injured birds to build up their flight muscles before being released.

A new dock will be installed at East Lake Park this spring. It will replace the old dock by the boat ramp. The new one will be about thirty feet long, constructed of plastic, and will have a kayak launch on it. This was paid for with a grant from the Iowa DNR's water recreation access grant and money donated in the memorial of Sarah Donaldson.



Prairie restoration work at Oakwood Grassland has been a two-year project. Last year we removed cedar trees to open up some of the area that has never been farmed. This year we removed the remaining Osage Orange trees (hedge trees) which now leaves nothing but open grassland. The plan this spring is to use fire to burn off the remaining thatch and spray the cool season grass to once again allow the warm season grasses and native wildflowers a chance to grow. We have already found a few species of plants, such as the Tall Green Milkweed, growing at Oakwood. This specie of milkweed is not found very often anymore. Hopefully once given a chance to grow, we will find many more native species that have been laying dormant all these years! Join us this summer on our Wildflower walk/rides and we can share with you what these plants look like in person.

Off to the next adventure!

CCCB Director,
Scott Kent

Bird Spotlight Cedar Waxwing, *Bombycilla cedrorum*

By Debi Talbot

Cedar waxwings are truly elegant looking birds with subtle yellow, beige, and pinkish tones and a bold black mask, with red and yellow feather tips, all topped off by a lovely crest. Some of the wing feathers have red tips that resemble sealing wax which is how they got their name. They tend to travel in flocks sometimes up to 100 individuals.

You will rarely see one individual bird. They measure about 6-7 inches long and weigh about 1 oz. The wingspan can range from 8.7 to 11.8 inches. They range from S. Alaska and S. Canada, south through the entire United States down through Mexico to Costa Rica.

They can be found in a variety of habitats with trees and shrubs, but generally favor edges or open woods and avoids dense forest. The presence of fruiting plants is important. Other habitats include open fields, deciduous and coniferous woodlands, bogs, orchards and suburban gardens. Their movements aren't limited to just a spring and fall migration but occur in response to fruit crop availability.

They have a very broad bill and gullet and swallow their food whole. They are frugivores. Because winter fruits are very high in sugar the birds are forced to drink large amounts of water. This also means they must consume tremendous amounts; therefore, they defecate a lot. 84% of the diet is fruit. These birds are considered important seed dispersers. At times when fruit is not abundant, flowers are consumed. Insects become an important food item in the spring. They have also been observed eating fermented fruit and if enough is eaten the birds will become intoxicated, flopping around on the ground in a drunken stupor.



Waxwings build bulky cup nests in trees or bushes using twigs, grasses and roots. Both males and females build the nest. They are usually positioned on a forked branch 1-15 m above the ground. The female takes sole responsibility for incubation of eggs and brooding the nestlings. The male plays an important role as he diligently delivers food to his mate during this period. The clutch size averages 5 eggs and the incubation period is 12 days, fledging after about 14-18 days.

These birds occur in abundance so you should be able to see them around Osceola. I have seen them at my house eating fruit from my weeping crabapple tree. Also listen for many ear piercing whistles which is a given for their presence.

Happy Birding,

Shed Hunting

By Judy Kjellsen

Between the months of January through March when the rut is over, the bucks are shedding their antlers, which makes this a great time of the year to head into the woods for some shed hunting!

The sport was new to me just seven years ago when I heard others talking about it at work and thought it sounded like a good adventure. We had some heavily timbered areas on our property that hadn't been explored for years, so my dog and I set out on the "hunt" not really knowing what we were looking for. If nothing else, it was nice just to get outside to follow some of the trails. About 20 minutes into my walk, I found one, took about 20 steps and found another. Wish it was always that easy! The moss growing on the sides of the sheds was a sign that they had been there awhile. I knew at that point I was hooked and looked forward to future hunts.



The first sheds I found.



According to the DNR, here's the science behind it: Male whitetail deer, called bucks, grow antlers during the summer. The antler is a honeycomb, bone-like tissue they use to fight other bucks and also to "rub" trees to mark their territory. While the antlers grow, they are covered in a velvet-like texture. During rut, the velvet begins to die off and bucks will also rub trees to help remove it. After the rut, the connecting tissue becomes weak and the antlers fall off.

Antlers drop annually in late winter, usually January through March. From spring through summer, the antlers grow back and are usually bigger than the previous year. From August through September, the antlers lose the velvet as breeding season, or "rut" begins, typically from October to early December. Then the cycle repeats.

Shed Hunting Continued.....

Where do you look for sheds? Look where there is or has been deer activity. Look for areas where the deer have bedded down, deer trails, or feeding areas. They love acorns, so check areas around oak trees. I've also looked around crossings where a buck might jump or jolt so waterways, ravines, fence lines or ditches are great places. The more you look the better you'll get, looking for lighter colored antler tips in contrast to the tan and yellow grasses. Sometimes antlers can also get caught in bushes a foot or two above the ground, but I have yet to find one that way. No permit or license is needed to hunt shed antlers in Iowa. However, you must have permission from the landowner if hunting on private land.

Not unlike other hunting seasons, sometimes you score big. And then there are times when you find something totally different, but either way it can be a rewarding adventure no matter how you look at it.



Buck with velvet.



Some of the sheds I've found over the years.

Coming this Summer!

Day camps for kids entering grades 1st through 6th.

Different topics each day!

Watch the "Clarke County Conservation" Facebook site for more information.

The 202-acre Vawn Wildlife Area

171-year Connection with the Miler-Hart-Vawn Families

By Barry Mateer

The term 'Vawn Corner' first appeared in the Osceola Sentinel on February 3, 1949. The driver of a pickup had lost control, rolled over several times before coming to rest in the Vawn feedlot. Damage to the vehicle was estimated at \$150.

Though the term 'Vawn corner' did not appear that often in the Sentinel or Tribune, it is still the 'Vawn Corner' to me and others who heard their parents refer to it as such. 'Vawn Corner' is located between two Clarke County parks, Vawn Wildlife Area and Oakwood Grassland Wildlife Area. It is because of James and his ancestors that the two parks exist. This article will focus on the Vawn Wildlife Area.

Recent Historical Connections

James Vawn, the only child of Walter and Marie Hart Vawn passed away in 2005 at age 63. His obituary gives a glimpse of James' life and insight into how he saw his place within the larger community.

https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/73492536/james_warren_vawn

His one-page will, written seventeen years before his death, left \$2,000 to the Osceola Public Library and \$5,000 to the Clarke County Historical Society. James left 80 acres of his farm to ... 'the Clarke County Conservation Commission to be used as a park or wild life area.' He left the remainder of his estate to Simpson College where he had attended college and had been elected Student Senate president his junior year in 1963.

The executor of the will had been James' college roommate and, at the time of James' death, was the mayor of Indianola. Jerry Kelly worked with Simpson College and Clarke County Conservation Board (CCCB) to explore possibilities for the farm land which James had left to Simpson College.

The 80-acre tract which James outright donated to the Clarke County Conservation Board (CCCB) was bordering an additional 122 acres of land that James owned. In March of 2007, in order for CCCB to purchase this additional land, the Department of Natural Resources awarded a grant of \$99,000 from the Wildlife Habitat Stamp Fund.

In addition, the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation helped with funding until additional grants and funding could be procured by CCCB. With such teamwork, and a total payment of \$199,000, CCCB became owners of the additional 122 acres of land that James had left to Simpson College. The 202-acre Vawn Wildlife Area is located 7 miles northeast of Osceola, off U.S. 69, along Oakwood St. and 280th Ave.

Pre-Civil War Connections

It is in this 'neck of the woods' of Fremont and Liberty townships that James' 2nd great grandparents, James and Mary Bonham Miler homesteaded. They were born and had married in Ohio. Clarke County land records show they were here by October of 1853. In 1856, the parents and five children were enumerated in the Clarke County census. By 1860 there were seven children.

In 1864, James Miler died at age 44. He is likely buried in a pioneer burial ground now referred to as Twyford Cemetery. No records have come to light which shows any of the land owners having deeded it over to Liberty Township. Therefore, it is not overseen by Liberty Township trustees.

This pioneer burial ground lies on the other side of the east boundary fence of the Vawn Wildlife Area. Even in 1930's when the Work Projects Administration's (WPA) Grave Survey Project was done in Clarke County, there was no remaining headstone that clearly identified James Miler's grave. His wife, Mary Bonham Miler, was buried in Fremont Township's Union Chapel Cemetery in 1906. The WPA in 1930 did find a headstone for James Naylor who was born in 1772, before the Revolutionary War.

https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/24308857/james_w_naylor

The 1930's WPA survey did indicate that James Vawn's great grandfather, Samuel Hart, had a headstone in the Twyford Cemetery.

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/11543626/samuel-hart>

Samuel Hart (1836-1879) enlisted with the first group of Clarke County men to be mustered in the Civil War; composing Company F of Iowa Sixth Infantry. With the roster of Company F full, some Clarke County men went to Chariton and enlisted in Co. B.

These volunteers headed off to war in 1861 after the 4th of July celebration in Osceola. "This band of patriots set out with teams July 9, for Eddyville, Wapello County, whence they proceeded by rail to Burlington, arriving on the evening of the 11th. They were mustered into service July 17, 1861. This being the first company from Clarke County."

http://iagenweb.org/hardin/civilwar/6th_inf/6th-history.htm

Samuel Hart married Emeline Miler in 1863 after he was discharged from the army with a disability. They had 7 children before he passed away in 1879. James Vawn's great grandfather, Samuel Hart, is buried in Twyford Cemetery. His headstone is a government issued one. Emeline Hart remained on the farm in Liberty Township, and raised their seven children to adulthood. The 1957 obituary of the oldest, Eugene Hart, said:

"His father died in 1879 leaving most of the care of the family to Eugene and Ed, then 14 and 13 years of age. They never married but devoted their lives to the family."

James Vawn's 2nd great grandparents, great grandparents, grandparents, and parents and a host of other relatives all lived in the neighborhood of Vawn Wildlife Area.

The last paragraph of James' obituary is a fitting way to draw to a close.

"James had a sense of place, he knew where he was, and that being there was important. He was a good friend and servant to his community. We will miss him more than we know and more than he would ever believe."



Why Controlled Burns are Important

Article by the US Forest Service

Did you know fire can be good for people and the land? After many years of fire exclusion, an ecosystem that needs periodic fire becomes unhealthy. Trees are stressed by overcrowding; fire-dependent species disappear; and flammable fuels build up and become hazardous. The right fire at the right place at the right time:

- Reduces hazardous fuels, protecting human communities from extreme fires;
- Minimizes the spread of pest insects and disease;
- Removes unwanted species that threaten species native to an ecosystem;
- Provides forage for game;
- Improves habitat for threatened and endangered species;
- Recycles nutrients back to the soil; and
- Promotes the growth of trees, wildflowers, and other plants;

The Forest Service manages prescribed fires and even some wildfires to benefit natural resources and reduce the risk of unwanted wildfires in the future. The agency also uses hand tools and machines to thin overgrown sites in preparation for the eventual return of fire.

Specialists write burn plans for prescribed fires. Burn plans identify – or prescribe – the best conditions under which trees and other plants will burn to get the best results safely. Burn plans consider temperature, humidity, wind, moisture of the vegetation, and conditions for the dispersal of smoke. Prescribed fire specialists compare conditions on the ground to those outlined in burn plans before deciding whether to burn on a given day.



Friends Of Clarke County Conservation

The Friends of Clarke County Conservation Foundation, known as *Friends*, is a tax exempt corporation organized under the Iowa Nonprofit Corporation Act, Chapter 504A of the 1990 Code of Iowa, and the provisions of Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. The foundation was established in 1997 for the purpose of soliciting and accepting gifts and donations from persons and organizations for developing and enhancing environmental education and conservation projects within the scope of the jurisdiction of the Clarke County Conservation Board.

The goals of the organization are: (1) to support and further the functions of the Clarke County Conservation Board by serving as a vehicle for community involvement, (2) to advise CCCB of the needs of the community regarding facilities and programs, (3) to raise funds for designated projects, and (4) to serve as an organizational base for volunteers.

Categories of membership are determined by the annual dues, which range from Student at \$5.00 to Organizational at \$100, (see enclosed membership form). Membership dues and contributions are tax deductible. Membership in the "*Friends*" foundation is open to everyone regardless of race, religion, creed, national origin, age, gender, or handicap.

An annual general membership meeting is held to elect the "*Friends*" Board of Directors, a seven (7) member board that sets the policies and goals, and generally manages the affairs of the foundation.

Friends of Clarke County Conservation

Membership Application

- ☐ Organization/Business (\$100)
- ☐ Family (\$20)
- ☐ Individual (\$10)
- ☐ Student (\$5)

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

E-Mail: _____

Date: _____

Amount Enclosed: _____

☐ Yes! I want to be a part of the "*Friends*" volunteer corps.

Make checks payable to:
Friends of Clarke County Conservation,
C/O Clarke Co. Conservation Board
100 South Main, Osceola, IA 50213



Clarke County Conservation
100 S. Main St.
Osceola, IA 50218

